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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 009327

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: MGLE01: PLO REFUGEE DEPT. ON ZAKI'S NEXT MISSION TO LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 3799

Classified By: DCM Daniel Rubinstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: PLO Department of Refugee Affairs (DORA) DG Mohammed Abu Bakr is preparing to return to Beirut with Palestinian Commissioner Abbas Zaki in mid-December to commence negotiations with the GOL. According to Abu Bakr, the PLO is ready to assume sole negotiating responsibility in order to secure the continued engagement of PM Siniora's government. However, Abu Bakr is trying to neutralize the PFLP-GC's historical influence over the PLO DORA offices in Beirut to take full advantage of Lebanon's willingness to improve conditions in Lebanon's refugee camps. Abu Bakr also believes that Abbas Zaki has decided to visit Damascus en route to Lebanon to lay the groundwork for his discussions on Palestinian militia disarmament. He also revealed that Zaki has had problems recruiting an official to head the PLO's formal diplomatic mission in Beirut. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) BACKGROUND: Abu Bakr is a former private banker and ally of the PA President. Abu Mazen appointed him to join Abu Zaki's negotiating team shortly after meeting with PM Siniora in Paris. He accompanied Zaki on his initial November 5-11 mission to Lebanon and participated in Zaki's calls on factional and militant leaders, including Hizballah leader Nasrallah. Abu Bakr was organizing the PLO's return mission until November 19 when he was hospitalized in Amman with a life-threatening heart condition. He briefed visiting PRM Acting A/S Greene on the PLO strategy shortly before being hospitalized, and contacted refcoord again after his release from the hospital November 28 to review how the meeting PM Siniora and PA President Abu Mazen held over the weekend in Barcelona was affecting PLO strategy.

PLO PREPARED TO START TALKS WEEK OF DECEMBER 11  
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3. (C) On November 28, Abu Bakr confirmed that he and Abbas Zaki were preparing to return to Lebanon the week of December 11 to start negotiations with the GOL. Characterizing Abu Mazen's position as "sincere and committed," he confirmed that the PLO is prepared to assume sole responsibility for the Palestinian negotiating position, but noted that he and Zaki would need to continue to leverage their position on the ground to fulfill their strategic objectives of ensuring Palestinian refugees are not used as "bullets in the guns of others" and to take advantage of the unprecedented opportunity the GOL was providing to improve the conditions Palestinian refugees face in Lebanon.

ZAKI TO VISIT SYRIA MID-DECEMBER EN ROUTE TO BEIRUT  
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4. (C) Abu Bakr believes that Zaki has decided to visit Damascus en route to Lebanon. He revealed that SARG GAPAR DG Ali Moustapha (strictly protect) had approached him on the margins of a November 15-17 UNRWA stakeholders meeting at the Dead Sea to convey an offer to facilitate such a visit, and indicated that the PLO hopes that that overture means the SARG will exert constructive pressure on the PFLP-GC and the Fatah al-Intifada. Abu Bakr thought Zaki would meet with rejectionist groups if SARG meetings do not materialize to try to leverage messages groups in northern Lebanon are clearly receiving. Abu Bakr explained that Zaki received a cold reception when he visited the pro-Syrian camps in the north, and was also warned by Nasrallah "not to discuss disarmament with Lebanon" during his last visit. (COMMENT: Abu Bakr suspects that Ali Moustapha, a Palestinian refugee, may be acting on his own initiative. END COMMENT.) Abu Bakr also indicated that Zaki was having difficulty recruiting officials from within PLO ranks to represent them in Beirut. According to Abu Bakr, former PLO Representative in Lebanon Shafiq El Hout rejected Zaki's offer to head the formal diplomatic mission the GOL is reestablishing. Abu Bakr also noted that practical issues are working against them. The PLO, for example, is still waiting for the GOL to respond to its request to help evict/compensate several Lebanese families squatting in its Beirut offices.

PLO, UNRWA POSITIONING THEMSELVES TO RAMP UP AID  
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15. (C) However, Abu Bakr said that he is trying to immediately open a separate office in Beirut to start GOL/Palestinian coordination on humanitarian aid issues, explaining that it is critical to de-link humanitarian aid initiatives from disarmament talks in the mind of Palestinian factions on the ground. While acknowledging that all Palestinian factions generally support improving refugee living conditions, Abu Bakr said that there is deep skepticism about Zaki's motivations. Abu Bakr added that he does not trust the existing PLO/DORA office in Beirut to work constructively with the GOL, explaining that the rejectionist sympathies of some of the staff in that office have left the DORA office "a virtual PFLP-GC office in the eyes of the refugees." (NOTE: Abu Bakr needs external funding to open this office; he has approached the Swiss in Amman to date. END NOTE.) In addition to establishing a trusted team to work on humanitarian issues in Beirut, Abu Bakr has secured the agreement of Gaza-based head of PLO/DORA/Fatah Central Committee Member Dr. Zakaria al Agha, to make his first trip to Beirut December 14 to persuade Lebanon Fatah Party Representative Sultan Abu Al-Aynayn to support his efforts. Abu Bakr said he also hoped to explore whether PLO/DORA could use its own funding to immediately launch projects to ameliorate conditions in the camps.

16. (C) Separately, UNRWA Lebanon Field Director Richard Cook told PRM A/S Greene in a November 17 meeting at the Dead Sea that UNRWA is starting to position itself to take advantage of the new openings presented by the GOL's Palestinian initiative. According to Cook, Commissioner-General Abu Zayd is currently deciding whether UNRWA should launch a separate appeal for Lebanon, given that several pressing projects to repair UNRWA's severely deteriorating housing, sewer and water systems in Beirut camps were removed from the Medium Term Plan, which UNRWA launched in February, based on the lack of GOL support that existed at that time. Cook predicted that UNRWA would proceed cautiously and use a new 15 million Euro package of education projects that UNRWA expects to sign with the EC in Beirut next month as a test case. (NOTE: The GOL has indicated that it is actively considering providing UNRWA additional land outside its densely populated camps in Beirut to construct four new schools. END NOTE.)

17. (U) PRM Acting A/S Greene and Embassy Beirut cleared this message.

HALE